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# HUMANITY THE ONLY TRUE DIVINITY.

BY WILLIAM PITT, EARL OF CHATHAM.\*

THE Earl of Chatham wrote the following "Address to the People of England." It was originally printed in the "London Journal," in 1733.

GENTLEMEN, — Whoever takes a view of the world will find that what the greatest part of mankind have agreed to call religion has been only some outward exercise esteemed efficient to work a reconciliation with God. It has moved them to build temples, slay victims, offer up sacrifices, to fast and feast, to petition and thank, to laugh and cry, to sing and sigh, by turns ; but it has not yet been found sufficient to induce them to break off an amour, to make restitution of ill-gotten wealth, or to bring the passions and appetites to reasonable subjection. Differ as much as they may in opinion concerning what they ought to believe, or after what manner they are to serve God, as they call it, yet they all agree in gratifying their appetites. The same passions reign eternally in all countries and in all ages : Jew and Mohammedan, the Christian and the Pagan, the Tartar and the Indian, — all kinds of men, who differ in almost everything else, — universally agree with regard to their passions. If there be any difference among them, it is this, — that, the more superstitious, they are always the more vicious ; and, the more they believe, the less they practice. This is a melancholy consideration to a good mind ; it is a most terrible truth ; and certainly, above all things, worth our while to inquire into. We will, therefore, probe the wound, and search it to the bottom : we will lay the ax to the root of the tree, and show you the true reason why men go on in sinning and repenting, repenting and sinning again, through the whole course of their lives ; and the reason is, because they have been taught, most wickedly taught, that religion and virtue are two things absolutely distinct ; that the deficiency of the one might be supplied by the sufficiency of the other ; and that what you want in virtue you must make up in religion. But this religion — so dishonorable to God, and so pernicious to men — is worse than Atheism : for Atheism, though it takes away one great motive to support virtue in distress, yet it furnishes no man with arguments to be vicious ; but superstition, or what the world means by religion, is the greatest possible encouragement to vice, by setting up something as religion which shall atone and commute for the want of virtue. This is establishing in-

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\* William Pitt, it will be remembered, was a true friend of the American Colonies in those "times that tried men's souls." Macaulay says he was "the first Englishman of his time, and he made England the first country in the world." Bancroft declares, that, of the English nation, he was "*the noblest representative and type.*"

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iquity by a law, the highest law; by authority, the highest authority, — that of God himself. We complain of the vices of the world, and of the wickedness of men, without searching into the true cause. It is not because they are wicked by nature, for that is both false and impious; but because, to serve the purposes of their pretended soul-savers, they have been carefully taught that they are wicked by nature, and cannot help continuing so. It would have been impossible for men to have been both religious and vicious, had religion been made to consist wherein alone it does consist, and had they been always taught that true religion is the practice of virtue, in obedience to the will of God, who presides over all things, and will finally make every man happy who does his duty. This single opinion in religion, that things are so well made by the Deity, that virtue is its own reward, and that happiness will ever arise from acting according to the reason of things; or that God, ever wise and good, will provide some extraordinary happiness for those who suffer for virtue's sake, — is enough to support a man under all difficulties, to keep him steady to his duty, and to enable him to stand as firm as a rock amidst all the charms of pleasure, profit, and honor. But this religion of reason, which all men are capable of, has been neglected and condemned, and another set up, the natural consequences of which have puzzled men's understandings, and debauched their morals, more than all the lewd poets and Atheistical philosophers that ever infested the world; for, instead of being taught that religion consists in action, or obedience to the eternal moral law of God, we have been most gravely and venerably told that it consists in the belief of certain opinions which we could form no ideas of; or which were contrary to the clear perceptions of our minds; or which had no tendency to make us either wiser or better; or, which is much worse, had a manifest tendency to make us wicked and immoral. And this belief, — this impious belief, — arising from imposition on one side, and from want of examination on the other, has been called by the sacred name of religion; whereas, real, genuine religion consists in knowledge and obedience. We know there is a God, and we know his will, which is, that we should do all the good we can; and we are assured, from his perfections, that we shall find our good in so doing. And what would we have more? Are we, after so much inquiry, and in an age full of liberty, children still? And cannot we be quiet unless we have holy romances, sacred fables, and traditionary tales, to amuse us in an idle hour, and give rest to our souls, when our follies and vices will not suffer us to rest?

You have been *taught*, indeed, that right belief, or orthodoxy, will, like charity, cover a multitude of sins. But be not deceived: belief of, or mere assent to, the truth of propositions upon evidence, is not a virtue, nor unbelief a vice. Faith is not a voluntary act. It does not depend upon the will. Every one must believe or disbelieve, whether he will or not, according as evidence appears to him. If, therefore, men, however dignified or



distinguished, command us to believe, they are guilty of the highest folly and absurdity, because it is out of our power ; but if they command us to believe, and annex rewards to belief, and severe penalties to unbelief, then are they most wicked and immoral, because they annex rewards and punishments to what is involuntary, and, therefore, neither rewardable nor punishable. It appears, then, very plainly unreasonable and unjust to command us to believe any doctrine, good or bad, wise or unwise : but when men command us to believe opinions which have not only no tendency to promote virtue, but which are allowed to commute or atone for the want of it, then are they arrived at the utmost reach of impiety ; then is their iniquity full ; then have they finished the misery and completed the destruction of poor mortal men. By betraying the interest of virtue they have undermined and sapped the foundation of all human happiness, and how treacherously and dreadfully have they betrayed it ! A gift well applied ; the chattering of some unintelligible sounds called creeds ; and unfeigned assent and consent to whatever the Church enjoins ; religious worships and consecrated feasts ; repenting on a death-bed ; pardons rightly sued out, and absolutions authoritatively given,—have done more towards making and continuing men vicious than all their natural passions and infidelity put together : for infidelity can only take away the supernatural rewards of virtue ; but these superstitious opinions and practices have not only turned the scene, and made men lose sight of the natural rewards of it, but have induced them to think, that, were there no hereafter, vice would be preferable to virtue, and that they still increase in happiness as they increase in wickedness. And this they have been taught in several religious discourses and sermons delivered by men whose orthodoxy was never doubted ; particularly by a late reverend prelate, I mean Bishop Atterbury, in his sermon on these words : “ If in this life only be hope, then we are of all men most miserable,” where vice and faith ride most lovingly and triumphantly together : but these doctrines of the natural excellency of vice, the efficacy of a right belief, the dignity of atonements and propitiations, have, besides depriving us of the native beauty and charms of honesty, and thus cruelly stabbing virtue to the heart, raised and diffused among men a certain unnatural passion which we shall call religious hatred, — a hatred constant, deep-rooted, and immortal. All other passions rise and fall, die and revive again : but this of religious and pious hatred rises and grows every day stronger upon the mind as we grow more religious ; because we hate, for God’s sake, for our soul’s sake, and for the sake of those poor souls, too, who have the misfortune not to believe as we do. And can we, in so good a cause, hate too much ? The more thoroughly we hate, the better we are ; and the more mischief we do to the bodies and estates of those infidels and heretics, the more do we show our love to God. This is religious zeal, and this has been called divinity ; but remember that *the only true divinity is humanity.*

# The Radical;

*A Magazine issued Monthly at 25 Bromfield St., Boston.*

THE present is the time to subscribe for THE RADICAL. A new volume begins with this number. The proprietors make bold to say that it is a Magazine well deserving the attention of all. They say this upon the strength of those who contribute to its pages, and as the testimony its present list of readers freely offers. There is no other journal issued monthly which endeavors to treat the subject of religion from the same intellectual view,—that of untrammelled observation and experience. It is devoted to the study of the religious sentiment as the basis and support of character. If it does not enlist as a special advocate in the several reforms of the hour, it is not from want of sympathy with the aims of many of them, but because it perceives the deeper significance of philosophy and religion to the free growth and development of man. Our age is mainly exercised in the amelioration of outward conditions. This is a costly method, for it does not relate itself primarily to character. It is not possible to preserve even the best extemporized condition of society with the strong arm of the law. There is need of a higher, deeper, broader development of personal character. *Life* is this dream,—made real within the soul of each. It is the mission of religion to effect this personal elevation to inward power,—to the conscious nobility of the free soul. As character prevails in a community, the selfish, grasping, mean displays of neighbor against neighbor, which the reforms can but regulate, disappear.

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